

## Extenuating Circumstances Procedure

To be completed by Quality:

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This document can also be produced in alternative formats upon request.

## Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Absence from College	3
3	Regulations Governing Student Assessment in Coursework and Examination	4
4	What are Extenuating Circumstances	4
5	How do I obtain a EC1 form	5
6	When should I submit an EC1 form	5
7	How do I submit an EC1 form	6
8	How much information do I need to include	6
9	What documentary evidence do I need to provide	6
10	Is the information I provide treated confidentially	7
11	What happens if I am feeling stressed	7
12	What happens when IT equipment fails	8
13	How are extenuating circumstances judged	8
14	Possible judgement outcomes	8
15	How are students informed of outcomes	9
16	Can I withdraw my EC1 form	9
17	False Claims	9
18	Data Protection Act 1998	9
19	Where can I get more guidance	10
20	Appendix 1 – EC1 Form	11
21	Monitoring and Review	14

## 1. Introduction

**This procedure sets out the guidelines for students who are unable to attend, submit coursework or sit examinations.** *(Note: References in this document to AQSC apply to Progress Boards and Course/Subject Committees which meet to consider student progress).*

## 2. Absence from College

College attendance procedures are that:

- A student who has been absent without permission for more than three days through illness or other cause must notify immediately either the Course Director/Module Tutor or the research supervisor. Where the absence is for a period of more than five working days, and/or is caused by illness, which may affect the student's studies, the student shall arrange, save in exceptional circumstances, for a medical certificate to be presented.
- All information is sent to the relevant Course Director by email so that all illness information is captured. Within this email there should be notification that students are able to note dates of absence and the effect of this absence on their academic work. Students must forward all extenuating circumstances requests to their Course Director and in the event of a Course Director being absent, students must contact their Module Tutor.
- Students should realise this is not another piece of bureaucracy. Research shows that attendance is a key component in academic success, and we hope that this form will make it easier for you to monitor your absence. We also hope that it will help academic staff to be aware of any problems you might be having as they occur and to offer you advice and help or refer you to another service in the College as appropriate.
- This email notification to your Course Director might be a crucial piece of evidence if your health or other circumstances interfere with being able to complete or submit assessed work, when a copy may authenticate a difficulty which arose before the assessment date, but which nevertheless affected your performance. It is increasingly difficult to obtain medical evidence for illnesses which you can only report to your GP later and the AQSC are unlikely to take such retrospective evidence seriously. It is, therefore, of great importance that you provide evidence of ill-health or other difficulty at the time that it occurs.

### 3. Regulations Governing Student Assessment in Coursework and Examination

a) Save in exceptional circumstances:

- Advice and guidance can be provided by the Course Director/Module Tutor. The Course Director will forward the appropriate paperwork and relevant evidence to the Higher Education Development Coordinator who will convene the extenuating circumstances panel. The panel will consider the application and provide the applicant with a decision within 3 working days from the submission of the application.

b) Evidence of ill-health must be authenticated by the candidate's medical adviser. Medical certificates should be forwarded directly to the Course Director. Self-certification will not be accepted.

The term 'exceptional circumstances' will be given a restrictive interpretation. The AQSC through the extenuating circumstance panel, shall determine exceptional circumstances which allow alternative forms of authentication of ill-health in respect of clause (b). Such circumstances may include an epidemic or pandemic. A candidate claiming exceptional circumstances in relation to the *late* submission of evidence under clause (a) must do so in writing. This will be considered under the Appeals procedures.

### 4. What are 'Extenuating Circumstances'?

Extenuating circumstances refer to something unforeseeable or unavoidable e.g. you couldn't write because you suffered a broken arm just prior to an examination. They are normally circumstances beyond the student's control which either prevent the student from taking an examination(s) or submitting coursework, or which affect academic performance in coursework or examination(s). Extenuating circumstances will usually be health related or of a personal nature.

Examples of extenuating circumstances that may be accepted by AQSC:

- a) Illness in the run-up to an examination or coursework deadline, or during an examination
- b) Bereavement in the run-up to an examination or coursework deadline (normally a close relative i.e. parent, child, partner or sibling)
- c) Sudden illness or emergency in connection with a family member or dependent
- d) Civil disturbance (rioting, intimidation, bomb-scares, bus and rail disruption)
- e) Traumatic event (e.g. being assaulted, or witnessing an accident or assault)
- f) Extreme weather conditions preventing either study or travel
- g) Domestic upheaval (fire, burglary, eviction)

### What circumstances are NOT taken into account?

It is not possible to list every circumstance that the AQSC would reject. Unless there are extraordinary circumstances, general pressure of academic work is not taken to be circumstances beyond your control, as you are expected to plan your work schedule.

Examples of extenuating circumstances that would **NOT** normally be accepted:

- a) Employment commitments limiting time available for study (although greater flexibility may be applicable to part-time students in full-time employment)
- b) Pressure of other academic work e.g. other coursework due around the same time
- c) Having to take a pre-arranged holiday
- d) Wedding preparations
- e) Sporting commitments (although exceptions might sometimes be made, e.g. if you were representing your country, or the College)
- f) Missing a bus
- g) Moving house
- h) Failure of IT systems, or inability to gain access to IT systems, when you have not taken adequate precautionary measures – e.g. failure to keep copies or save back-up versions, or ill-judged reliance on friends' or classmates' equipment or help or leaving it to the last minute to seek access to College facilities. In all such cases, these difficulties could have been foreseen and avoided at an earlier stage.

***NB These examples are not definitive and are intended only as a guide. In all cases, the AQSC has ultimate authority to use its discretion, considering the full circumstances of a particular case.***

A claim form (EC1) should be completed by a student affected by extenuating circumstances.

## 5. How do I obtain an EC1 form?

The form is available from your Course Director/Module Tutor or can be downloaded from the Policies and Procedures section on the College website.

## 6. When should I submit an EC1 form?

It is your responsibility to inform the Course Director/Module Tutor about extenuating circumstances that affected your academic performance by completing an EC1 form. **Although you may have previously discussed your difficulties with your Course Director/Module Tutor in your School, this does not in itself constitute the submission of extenuating circumstances.**

The form should be returned before the submission deadline i.e. 1 working day in advance of the submission of coursework or the sitting of the examination.

In exceptional circumstances the EC1 form should be returned no later than **5 working days following the submission date of coursework** or **5 days after the date of examination**.

### 7. How do I submit an EC1 form?

The completed form must be submitted to the Course Director/Module Tutor, by email. It may be sent by post if you are unable to attend the College. Evidence that is not immediately available should be forwarded as soon as possible.

### 8. How much information do I need to include?

The circumstances should be described clearly. The EC1 form should contain the essential information to enable an informed decision regarding the circumstances to be made. You should only include on the form details of the specific coursework or examinations that have been affected by illness, personal difficulties etc. Make sure you explain the impact these circumstances had on your performance (e.g. how long you were unable to attend due to illness). It is not the role of the AQSC to try to work this out or to seek further information on your behalf. Try to make your submission clear and concise.

You are also asked on the form to specify what outcome you would, within reason, consider desirable. This will normally be either a first sit in examination or class test, or an extension of time to submit coursework. There is no point in asking for additional marks to be awarded to compensate for your extenuating circumstances as **marks cannot be adjusted in this way**

You may find it helpful to discuss your application with your Course Director/Module Tutor, or another appropriate member of academic staff in addition to submitting your claim form. You will not have to disclose sensitive personal details if you prefer not to. Should you be reluctant to specify such details on the EC1 form, you should seek the advice of a College Counsellor or other suitable professional person. Great care is taken over the confidentiality of information provided by students and it is vital that you do not withhold evidence.

### 9. What documentary evidence do I need to provide?

It is your responsibility to supply the appropriate evidence to support your claim. This documentary evidence is normally required to accompany the EC1 form when it is submitted to the Course Director/Module Tutor. You should attach a copy of any previously sent relevant absence emails which you have submitted at the time of the difficulty.

Examples of appropriate evidence include: a medical certificate, a discharge letter from a hospital, a letter from a counsellor, from the PSNI or a solicitor. There are exceptional cases where such evidence is inappropriate or unavailable, for example because your doctor does not provide certificates for minor illness. However, in all other cases, students will be expected to provide documentary evidence. Where it is reasonable to expect such evidence and that evidence is missing, it is unlikely that the application will be successful.

A letter from your GP stating that you were seen on a particular date and you told them that you HAD BEEN ill will not normally be accepted by the AQSC.

If you are claiming a minor illness has affected work or caused you to miss a deadline, then please note that an absence form should have been submitted at the time of your absence. A duplicate copy of the absence form should accompany your EC1.

If you have been receiving treatment for a serious or long-term medical condition which you believe has seriously affected your work over a prolonged period, you must submit appropriate evidence.

Please seek guidance from your Course Director/Module Tutor if you are in doubt about what would be appropriate evidence.

### **10. Is the information I provide treated confidentially?**

Meetings scheduled by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (See Appendix 3 of AQSC doc) to discuss extenuating circumstances are confidential, and members have wide experience of the full range of problems that students can encounter. The minutes from this meeting will only record whether extenuating circumstances were considered and accepted/rejected – the nature of the circumstances will not be minuted. The decision from this meeting will be communicated to the chair of the AQSC at the point of progress or award decisions.

While there may be some factors which you would prefer not to commit to paper, you should reveal these by means of a private meeting with your Course Director/Module Tutor. If satisfied, either staff member may report (without full disclosure) that in their professional opinion you have legitimate extenuating circumstances. However, the onus is always on you to specify the degree of detail that you wish to have disclosed, *and this will need to be sufficient to satisfy the AQSC.*

### **11. What happens if I am feeling stressed?**

A certain degree of stress, anxiety and pre-examination nerves, and associated psychosomatic symptoms, are very common in the run-up to examinations. Coping with this pressure is part and parcel of the student experience. Presented with evidence of pre-examination stress, AQSC will be entitled to take into account:

- the extent to which this stress prevented you from performing to your full potential;
- the extent to which this stress is of a different nature to that experienced by all students at examination time;

- the extent to which this stress was self-inflicted, i.e. a consequence of failure to work steadily throughout the year;
- the extent to which this stress is likely to recur.

If you experience pre-examination stress, or have a disability that might impair your performance, you are encouraged to consult Student Support Services.

### 12. What happens when IT equipment fails?

There are some circumstances when failure of IT equipment will not be taken into account. The following list is not exhaustive:

- failure affecting a single workstation in a lab or a single failure in a dedicated lab;
- failure of your personal computer or network link;
- failure to access IT equipment and/or printing facilities in a timely manner;
- College's systems incompatible with home computer.

It would be expected that you should check that work brought in from home could be printed at the College well before assessment deadline.

Regarding the theft of a home computer, students are expected to make a back-up copy of all their work. This should be stored separately from the computer. A claim submitted on this basis would be considered at the discretion of the AQSC.

### 13. How are extenuating circumstances judged?

All claims will be judged at the discretion of the extenuating circumstances panel. The College seeks to determine whether, and to what extent, extenuating circumstances have affected your academic performance, and what action, if any, can be taken. In assessing the significance of extenuating circumstances the College will normally take into account:

- the severity of the problem and the length of time involved;
- any supporting documentary evidence;
- whether it is possible to gauge the effect of the extenuating circumstances upon academic performance.

### 14. Possible Judgement Outcomes

- a) A submission extension of 2 weeks;
- b) First sit of examination or class test;
- c) Capped or uncapped marking;
- d) The extenuating circumstances application has not been approved;
- e) Late submission penalties;



- f) For students enrolled on an Open University programme, 13.3 of the Regulations should be adhered to.

### 15. How Students are informed of Outcomes?

Students will be informed of the outcomes of their extenuating circumstances application by the Course Director by email within three days of the application submission date. The EC1 will be recorded on the students' Course Results Sheet for presentation at the Exam Board.

### 16. Can I withdraw my EC1 form?

An EC1 form cannot normally be withdrawn after receiving a mark for the work in question. However, if you have submitted an EC1 form in advance of an assessment and your circumstances improve you may withdraw the EC1 form before it is too late as follows:

- by submitting the coursework within the deadline, along with an accompanying statement that you wish to withdraw the EC1 form, and/or;
- by attempting the examination after submitting a statement to the effect that you wish to withdraw the EC1 form. This statement can only be submitted to the Course Director/Module Tutor before the start of the examination and must be witnessed and signed off to this effect, with the precise time recorded.

See [Appendix 1](#) for EC1 form.

### 17. False Claims

You should note that submitting a false claim could be regarded as an attempt to gain unfair advantage and could constitute a breach of discipline and depending on the nature and severity further action may be taken.

### 18. Data Protection Act 1998

By submitting an extenuating circumstances form you are agreeing to the College holding this personal data for the purposes of processing your claim. The College will hold this data in accordance with its notification under the 1998 Data Protection Act.

### **19. Where can I get more guidance?**

If after having read these notes you feel you need more help in putting forward your extenuating circumstances, you should contact your Course Director/Module Tutor or Student Services.



### 3 DETAILS OF EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

- i) **Nature of Difficulty:**      Illness                       Other Personal Circumstance   
*(Please tick as appropriate)*
- ii) **Date(s) on which you were affected** .....
- iii) **Absence from Study**  
*(Please indicate as appropriate)*
- Were you absent from the College for more than three working days as a result of your extenuating circumstances?      YES/NO
  - If 'YES' is a completed Notification of Absence Form attached?      YES/NO
- iv) **Supporting Evidence**  
*(Please indicate as appropriate)*
- Do you have medical certificate(s) or other supporting evidence?      YES/NO
  - If affected by flu do you have a supporting statement on the approved proforma (relevant in a flu pandemic situation only)?      YES/NO
  - \*If 'YES' is the evidence attached?      YES/NO  
If you do not have objective evidence you should explain below the nature of your difficulties. (You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary).

### 4 EFFECT OF EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

- i) Please explain the effect of the extenuating circumstances on performance in the assessments listed in section 2. (You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary).
- ii) Please state what your preferred outcome would be (e.g. specify the length of extension requested for coursework).

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information given on this form is a true and accurate statement of my personal circumstances.

**Student Signature** ..... **Date** .....

# Extenuating Circumstances Procedure

## SECTION B: TO BE COMPLETED BY EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES PANEL

*Please complete the details below in relation to the evidence presented.*

Module Code / CRN Number	Consideration of Evidence (Tick as appropriate)		Recommendation
	Upheld	Rejected	

Comments:

**NAME OF CHAIR OF EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES PANEL:** .....

**SIGNATURE** ..... **DATE** .....

*\*Examples of other Personal Circumstances and evidence to be presented can be found in the South West College Extenuating Circumstances Procedure.*

### **21. Monitoring and Review**

The College will establish appropriate information and monitoring systems to assist the effective implementation of this Procedure.

The College will ensure that adequate resources are made available to promote this Procedure effectively and is committed to reviewing this Procedure on a regular basis.